

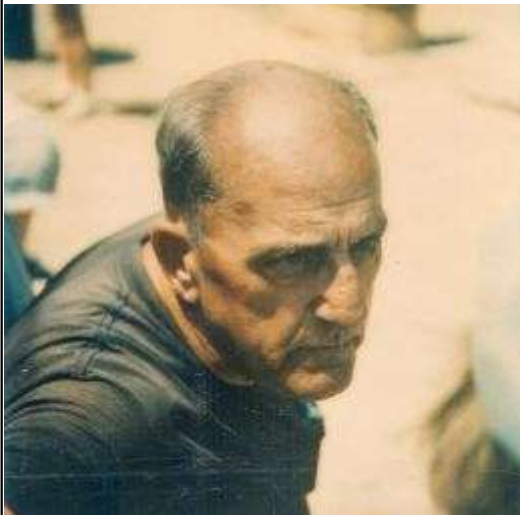


information acquired from the WSHPA Hall of Fame Book, newsletters and other sources

GERALD "DOC" MAISON

Warren, MI

inducted 1976



Doc won the state championship title five times
1971, 72, 75, 78, 79

He won the Water Wonderland Open four times
1969, 72, 78, 82.

He won the Capitol City Open in 1980.

Doc has pitched on the Michigan team in the
MI/ON friendship tournament and defeated the
great Elmer Hohl in one of these games.

He has won numerous district tournaments.

Doc has served on committees and served on the
board of directors.

Doc, Roy and Ken Jensen dominated horseshoes in
Michigan for many years. Doc passed away in 1985
and will be remembered by all.





By MIKE HUGHES
Staff Writer

DIMONDALE -With the gentle clang-clanging in the background, two old pros sat in the shade and talked about their art.

There was Doc the butcher and Ken the mailman. People will tell you they're the two finest horseshoe pitchers in Michigan.

THEY DON'T look like sports champs, but that's part of the charm of horseshoe pitching. Ken Jensen is 63, a tall, lean retired mailman from St. Joseph with five grandchildren. He's been taking it easy since his heart attack a few years ago.

Doc Maison is 61, a Chrysler worker and a former butcher with 13 grandchildren. He has a pipe, a folksy manner and a big pot belly.

THEY MAY not look like champs, but they're as near-perfect as horseshoe pitchers get. Both men hit ringers more than 70 per cent of the time. Maison has won three state titles; Jensen has won four. Maison has the official state record of 39 consecutive ringers; Jensen remembers a time before that when he had 44. So Maison and Jensen sat under a big tree in rural Dimondale and waited for their days in the sun. The also talked about the sport they love.

"This is wonderful fun," Maison said, puffing on his pipe. "It just gets in your blood. "

"IN HORSESHOES, you meet the nicest people anywhere," Jensen said.

They were in Dimondale for the annual state tournament. Some 105 pitchers are there, clanging

SMITH RECALLS pitching in the evenings, after he had finished his farm chores. By the time he was 14, he was beating the county fair champion. Jensen recalls pitching on the family farm near St. Joseph. "When you're young, you could go all day. We used to pitch 21 games on a Sunday."

Bob Wells, 39, had a simple enough reason for pitching on the family farm in Southern Indiana. "That's all there was to do. When we were kids, we used to take the horseshoes the farmers had nailed to fence posts."

Eventually, however, the game edged into the cities.

MAISON, FOR instance, was 48 years old when someone came into his butcher shop and suggested he go watch a horseshoe contest. He had never tried it before, within a year, he was a champion.

Gradually, Maison says, the game has stretched beyond country folks and oldsters. "You're getting more young people interested every year, Years ago, it was all old-timers. Now you see a lot of kids."

Indeed you do. As Pat Smith talked, he proudly pointed to his four grandsons in the junior competition. Some entire families were competing.

BOB WELLS, for instance, is 39 now and a purchasing manager for a Jackson company. He's a long way from those boyhood farm days, but now the Jackson horseshoe club has more than 100 members, making it the biggest in the state.

for fun and trophies.

That event is a big one that draws cars and trailers from all over the state. It also draws some local people, like Oscar Hope, who practices his pitching inside the Fisher Body plant on noon hours.

OR LIKE Pat Smith, a Dimondale route man who learned his pitching on the farm back in Depression time Nebraska.

The other classifications were at it Saturday, but today and Monday it will be time for the biggies. The state's top 12 pitchers will begin battling for the Class A championship. They'll be at it from about 2 to 7 p.m. today and from about noon to 5 p.m. Monday. (Other competition will begin at 10 a.m. each day.) Sometime during that Monday competition, the two old pros will be competing again. "I always know that I'm going to beat Ken," Maison said. "He always knows he's going to beat me. That's the only way you can do it."

BUT THE long weekend includes more than just a line of people throwing hunks of metal. It's a low-key social occasion, a pleasant country get together.

"It's like old home week here," Pat Smith said. "We all get acquainted again." Some people, like Ken Jensen, are staying with friends or relatives. (He stays with his son Charles, who lives in rural Eaton Rapids and is a technician for Lansing's Board of Water & Light.) Others, like Doc Maison, bring their own campers or trailers.

Indeed, the parking lot at the Chief Okemos Club on Gunnell Road is lined with campers. "At night, we all get together," Maison said. "People bring out their guitars, mouth organs, everything." Maison - the son of an old town fiddler - even steps in with his violin.

THERE ARE also good times during the day, as old friends meet and talk and watch the endless arcs of well thrown shoes. A refreshment stand has been set up and visitors are encouraged to come by and watch. "We're hoping we can get some new members that way," Pat Smith said.

What those visitors will see is a game that out dates football or baseball by 1,700 years or so.

Roman soldiers were doing it back around 100 A.D. Englishmen even played a modified version right inside their pubs.

In America, however, it has usually been a farmers game, using the old worn out shoes from their horses. "It was always a country picnic kind of thing," Pat Smith said.



Wells' daughter, Shelley, kept watching him and then decided to give it a try. She's 11 years old and already up to about 25-percent ringers. This year she won the Class B junior girls championship in the world tournament in Bristol, Pa.

What does it take? You have to have timing, rhythm, coordination, the old pros say. When it's working right, everything flows perfectly.

"A good player knows if it's not a ringer even before it leaves his hands," Jensen said. "Sometimes you'll hear him say, 'Oops.'"

IT ALSO takes practice. Doc Maison gets home from work every day about 3:30 and promptly starts pitching. Three or four nights a week, a friend from Detroit comes to visit and they have some competition on Maison's backyard court.

Maison figures he throws a few hundred shoes a day, but others top that. One old state champ used to throw a thousand a day.

"It's fun," Maison said, "but it's like any other sport. You have to work at it even if you don't want to. You have to abuse yourself."

THERE'S ONE big difference between horseshoes and the other sports, of course. "There's no money in it," Maison said. "A lot of trophies, but no money." Jensen looks at that philosophically. "Money could never pay for all this friendship."